

DISCUSSION OF AD HOC COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE

Overview

The Sub-Group Panel is charged with the responsibility for personnel actions in several areas. This charge is spelled out in EXCOM 9030-80. In carrying out these responsibilities the members of the Panel are expected to inform themselves adequately with respect to the salient characteristics of each person considered by the Panel and, further, to apply their knowledge of the employees in ways that satisfy the criteria of fairness, equity, and considerations of the needs of the Agency. In recognition of the fact that these criteria are more adequately met by the use of systematic, organized approaches than by informal, impressionistic applications of Panel members' hunches and feelings, the Executive Committee has directed that each Career Service devise a statement of Panel procedure which will spell out in some detail the procedural methods whereby that Panel will analyze information about employees and further how the results of such analysis will be used to arrive at recommendations for personnel actions. The Executive Committee is specific in stating that each Career Service will design a "Work Sheet" to be used in the deliberations of the Panels. The specific characteristics for this work sheet are left to the discretion of the individual career services in recognition of the fact that each has different kinds of problems to

address in personnel evaluation. While general performance criteria are mandated by the Executive Committee, the specific application and interpretation of these criteria are left to the Career Services (subject, of course, to appropriate approval).

The task posed to the committee making the recommendations given below was to apply the general mandates of the Executive Committee to the RR Career Service. We have been directed to recommend a work sheet for use by ORD Sub-Group Panels and procedures for its use. In doing this we have been instructed to take into consideration the unique problems of personnel appraisal in the research environment. Further, we have been directed to address the process of personnel appraisal at all GS levels for which the Career Service Panel procedures are appropriate under existing Agency regulations. Lastly, we have been mandated to apply, to the degree possible, the philosophy of "evaluation against objective criteria;" this in keeping with management desires in the area of the reduction of subjectiveness in personnel evaluation.

The recommendations represent the result of our attempts to reconcile often conflicting (and sometimes mutually exclusive) desiderata into a practical, useful, and acceptable methodology which, we believe, incorporates the letter and spirit of the Executive Committee's mandates. Preliminary exposure to both assessors and assessees suggests that acceptance will be forthcoming. We hope that ORD

management will find these recommendations workable, fair, and responsive to the desires of the Executive Committee.

Desirable Characteristics

Standardization. Any procedures proposed for use by Sub-Group Panels should be such as to make explicit the methods by which the decisions of the panel are reached. The principal purpose of such standardization is to make, insofar as possible, the decisions of any panel independent of the particular individuals comprising that panel. In other words, standardization would have been achieved when it could be demonstrated that several differently constituted panels would reach the same conclusions, given the same data about the employees to be appraised. It is highly unlikely that decisions can be totally independent of panel membership, but the criterion of procedural standardization should be a goal toward which to strive.

Objectivity. The current interest shown by management in the philosophy of objectivity in assessment should be reflected in any recommendations for panel procedures. The key concept is that of verifiability. As applied to the area of personnel appraisal, this means (as is stated in several personnel management guides) that there should be an explicit understanding by both the employee and management about exactly what actions, duties, behavior, and outcomes are expected. The degree to which these standards are or are not met will then form the basis for appraisals and subsequently, rewards or adverse action.

In the process of appraisal by the Sub-Group Panel, this objective approach should be adopted insofar as possible. Further, since panel members must make judgments where differences are frequently so slight as to make discrimination very difficult, panel procedures should, by their nature, guide panel members toward objectivity in their decisions.

Criteria. The criteria by which Sub-Group Panels appraise employees have been stated, in the general sense, by the Executive Committee. However, the elaboration of these criteria is left to each career service. In this way a degree of uniformity will exist across career services, but the system in its totality will not be excessively Procrustean.

The characteristics which must be considered by the RR Career Service must be concerned with the fact that the outcome of research activities is not a "product" in the usual sense of the word. Further, it is the nature of the research process that it deals, to a great extent, with activities whose outcomes are not only initially, undefined but often undefinable in principle. It is a truism to state that if the answer is known before the project starts there is no need to do the research.

This setting in which research personnel work provides, then, the basis for explication of the fundamental appraisal criteria as provided by the Executive Committee. These criteria should be expanded in such a way as to recognize

that research personnel work in domains of somewhat greater ambiguity than many other workers. Indeed, one of the principal criteria against which they should be judged is the facility with which they handle this ambiguity so as to reduce it for others.

Research workers must also maintain unusually high level of technical knowledge in a variety of areas and must simultaneously function in the administrative world of contract management. These considerations, then, should guide an attempt to expand the Executive Committee's criteria as they apply in the RR Career Service.

Flexibility. A career Service Panel work sheet (and the procedures for its use) must not impose undue restrictions on the actions of the Panel. The function of such things as work sheets is to standardize the process of applying human judgment, not to control it. The element of judgment must be paramount; the rules and procedures should be enabling not constricting. This implies that final outcomes of the panels' deliberations should be the direct result of the application of judgment. The methods, work sheets, and rules should have helped, guided, and generated an audit trail leading to the panels' decisions. Such aids must never be of such a nature as to generate the decisions "automatically" thus relieving the panel members of either the ability or the responsibility for making the final decisions.

Acceptability. Procedural aids in personnel appraisal must be acceptable both to the appraisers and the appraisees. The absence of the former will result in the circumvention of the "aids" because they are not seen as helpful. Acceptance by the appraisees is necessary because without it morale and, therefore, performance will suffer. This is not to say that universal acceptance of any method is necessary (or even possible), but substantial acceptance is certainly a characteristic which should be high on the list of anyone designing personnel appraisal methods or aids.

Validity. After the management, administrative, and humanistic requirements for a performance appraisal aid have been met, there still stands the need to make any such methodology scientifically and statistically sound. In meeting this requirement the designer must take into consideration what has been demonstrated in research in the field of the assessment of people and the appraisal of performance on the job. In considering this body of literature the designer must take into consideration such things as the reliability of the methods proposed. By this is meant the degree to which consistency is present; consistency across appraisers and across time by the same appraiser. Additionally, attention must be paid to validity. That is, "Do the methods generate results that coincide with reality?" Obviously, a method can have reliability without validity but the reverse is not true. Only a knowledge of the field of performance appraisal

and the application of this knowledge will result in a methodology with both reliability and validity.

These, then, are the major characteristics whose maximization must be attempted if an adequate work sheet (with procedures) is to be generated for use by the Career Service Panel of the RR Career Service. It is the belief of the members of the committee that these matters have received adequate and appropriate attention in our efforts to fulfill our charge. Our recommendations are given in the attached "Recommended Procedures for ORD Sub-Group Panels".